LOADSTAR LETTER #20

March 1995 Companion newsletter for LOADSTAR #130

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Check It Out!

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The Compleat Maurice Completed

LOADSTAR proudly announces the publication of its fourth major product in the "COMPLEAT" series -- *THE COMPLEAT MAURICE!* This is a compilation of the 26 solitaire card games written by Maurice Jones, the acknowledged master of card game simulations for the C-64/128. There's even a brand new, never before published game called *Boomerang*.

The easy-to-use LOADSTAR-like menu system will take you through the evolution of card gaming on computer, starting with Maurice's early card game "models" and ending with the feature-filled programs that LOADSTAR subscribers look forward to every month. Each game has complete instructions and a personal message from the author himself, written specifically for this edition.

The COMPLEAT MAURICE comes on two 5.25 inch disks or one 3.5 inch disk for only $20 postpaid! That's less than $1 a game! All the programs have been upgraded to work on any drive.

If you've got a C-64/128 friend who likes playing card solitaires, you can't beat THE COMPLEAT MAURICE as a gift that will be enjoyed over and over again.

Advertisers Locked Out Of Loadstar Letter?

by Jeff Jones. I receive all sorts of inquiries from Commodore companies who want to place ads in the LOADSTAR LETTER. Unfortunately new space rarely opens up because we're only an 8-page publication, we're free, and we have to print thousands of these things every month.

We've toyed with expanding to a 12-page newsletter to accommodate a few more ads without sacrificing content. The problem is that it would increase printing costs as well as postage. The increase in revenue from the extra ads would not outweigh the increased costs. Were we charging you for the LOADSTAR LETTER, we'd probably have 20 pages. Believe me, I could fill them. But we're on a mission of love here. We're what we call a *lagniappe* in Louisiana -- a freebie. So we can't afford the luxury of another page when The LOADSTAR LETTER is already any businessman's liability.

Because dieHard is in transition right now, we had a page open up, which is why you see a new ad for *LOTTOMAN* in the newsletter. I could include more ads at the expense of content, but I need to hear from you first. Could you stand a little less text because you want to see who's selling what in the Commodore world or do you want things to stay the way they are? Let me know.

Computers In The Classroom

by Dave Moorman. Jane Anne Jeffries is a bilingual third and fourth grade teacher in Los Angeles who has a dream -- to bring computer assisted education to her classroom. And, as with all dreams that depend on government money, Jane Anne's is having a rough time becoming a reality. Grant money is drying up. School districts -- already strapped for cash -- must focus on providing the latest hardware and software for the secondary level.

So Jane Anne took hold of her dream. She dipped into her own purse to buy a couple of Commodore 64s for her classroom. She also managed to get donations of a couple of Apple IIes and an old IBM -- cast-offs of a previous technological heyday.

This is no rank amateur: Ms. Jeffries' Masters mini-thesis at California State University at LA was on the use of the computer in teaching elementary mathematics. "I have some frustration," she writes, "[because] I know what I should be doing, but have neither the hardware nor software nor time nor expertise to do what I consider a good job."

According to Jane Anne, the mathematics framework guidelines specify how the computer is to be used in the teaching of math. Teachers really do not have a choice but to use computers if they are to follow the guidelines. The problem, of course, is teacher computer illiteracy, and the lack of proper hardware/software. Jane Anne and other teachers at her school are solving the hardware problem the hard way -- looking for donations of equipment. Any equipment.

After she installed the C-64s in her classroom, Jane Anne got online at the Delphi Com Com SIG (Computers Commodore Special

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Interest Group) in search for educational software. This is where I met her. I suggested LOADSTAR as an ongoing source of useful software, some even educational. I also cheated and sent her a copy of "Airport '93." (I slowed the game down some. See the docs on issue #118.)

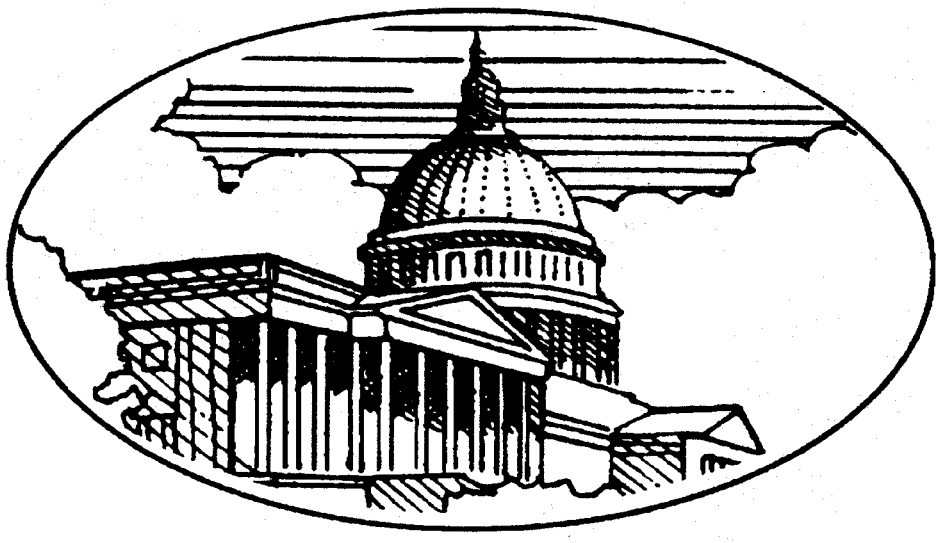
The computers in her third and fourth grade classroom are a powerful "carrot." Students who complete their traditional classroom work early can then "play" on the computers. Then these students tutor other kids. One C-64 has a typing tutor running on it. The other has Airport, which not only teaches quick typing of numbers, but encourages doing addition in the head.

On one low attendance day, Ms. Jeffries set aside the lesson plan and teamed the children up on the computers to "just" play games. In getting the games up and running and figuring out the rules, the students also had to do a lot of reading for comprehension -- with documentation text that challenged their reading level!

Her classroom also has two Apple IIcs. One is used for Spanish software developed for grades K-5. The other is loaded with a tutorial on Basic. Teaching programming one-on-one is difficult. Jane Anne dreams of getting an LCD device to put on top of her overhead projector. "But who had a couple thousand bucks?" she asks.

Computer literacy, as a goal of dedicated educators, is not dead. The problem -- especially at the elementary level -- is in acquiring hardware with literally NO budget. Then comes the frustration of finding adequate and appropriate software -- for a baffling array of platforms and incompatibilities. All this ON TOP of a teacher's normal classroom load. And even the most conscientious educator has a difficult time staying computer literate in four major platforms -- Apple, Mac, Commodore, and IBM.

Let's hear it for Jane Anne Jeffries -- and (I do hope) thousands like her -- who put the future of her students above the financial and technical problems of today.



Jeff E-mails Clinton, Receives Plain Brown Package From Washington, D.C., Gets Sick, Misses 3 Days Of Work. Doctor Prescribes Antibiotics

by Jeff Jones. A while back, I saw a news piece about George Bush's decision to cease signing autographs in an effort to keep their value up. When I heard the value of the autograph of an ex-President, I thought: "Man! I had better get one while I can!" So I logged onto GEnie and E-mailed *president@whitehouse.gov* to ask for an autographed picture. I received a standard auto-reply and figured that the most Clinton would ever get of my message was that *x* number of people E-mailed and asked for an autograph last week or month.

Well, as the months passed, I forgot about my enterprising venture. Then, one day, when I darted home for lunch, I checked the mail and saw a big tan envelope with a most arrogant return address: **"The White House, Washington."** Well I was flattened when I opened it and found an autographed photo of Clinton and Gore, along with a signed letter from Da Prez.

I brought the package back to work, and was immediately told by my oh so cynical coworkers that the signatures couldn't possibly be real, and that someone else probably signed them. Clinton's letter, though seeming to respond to a few things I mentioned in my Email, was "obviously" a mail merged form letter (probably not done with *LETTERMEISTER* from issue #91). I'll buy that, but no one at Softdisk believes that he really signed the letter. Looks like a pen to me, but they swear it's an autopen macro.

These people were sure, so sure of themselves. "Hey, I know because..." fill in the blank. Ho hum. I'll throw the package from Washington into the box with my comic collection. Maybe it'll be worth *something* one day, even if it's only an argument.

Oh, yeah, the illness had nothing to do with the package. My daughter caught strep-throat, probably at daycare, gave it to her sister, who gave it to my wife, who gave it to me. Total doctor bills a few hundred. Total antibiotic cost? $9. Too bad the public isn't trusted to medicate itself. You have to pay nearly a hundred bucks to visit a doctor for five minutes and get the prescription that you know you need. What makes it so ironic is when you have insurance that makes no medicine cost more than $3.00 but in order to take advantage of it, you have to first see the doctor for an outrageous fee. Here's an idea: Big pharmacies should have a doctor on the premesis who can prescribe stuff like antibiotics for free. But let's not bring up that health care thing again.

Review: BBU &BBG

by John Elliot. Jeff's pre-mumble: We haven't mentioned BBGRAM at all on LOADSTAR,

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(Specify computer and drive serial number)

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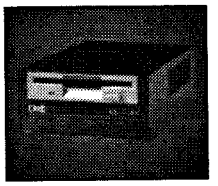

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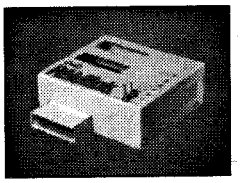

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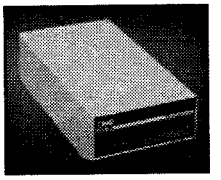

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The Compleat Maurice: A compilation of the 26 solitaire card games written by Maurice Jones, the acknowledged master of card game simulations for the C-64/128. There's even a brand new, never before published game called *Boomerang.* **Two 5.25 inch disks #0007D5 or one 3.5 inch disk #0007D3.**

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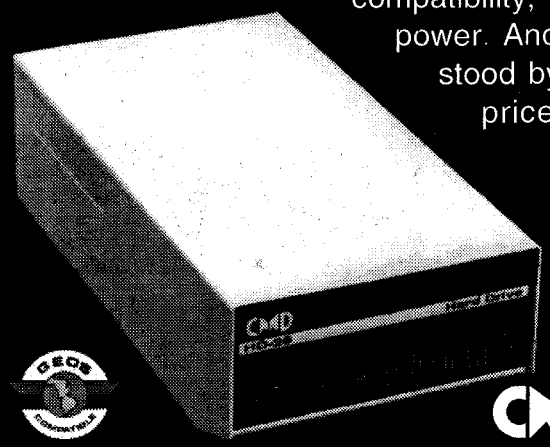

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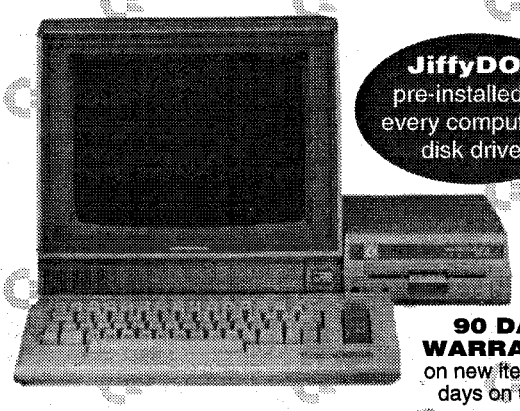

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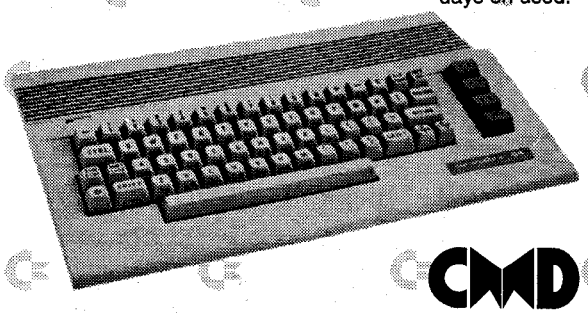

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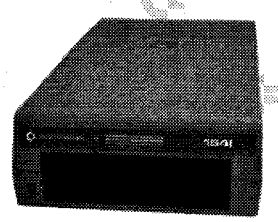

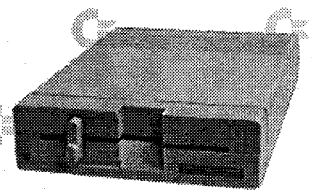

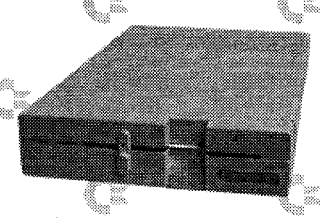

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mainly because we've never received any of the units for review. We did receive an early version of RAMLink and fell in love with it, bought more RAMLinks and have told everyone "get them!" But never let it be said that because CMD is our biggest advertiser, and our long-distance phone chums, that we'd try to keep news of their only competitor subdued. John Elliot seems to like these devices which we've never seen. We invite PPI to advertise in the LS letter (if we can manage the room), and send us review units of their products. We'd be glad to mention any new product that falls on our desks. Anyway, here's John:

My The Write Stuff (TWS) word processor like RunScript Plus and the 128 version of Paperclip III, can use a RAM expansion unit for fast dictionary access. Much of this advantage is lost by the necessity of reloading the dictionary to the Ram Expansion Unit (REU) whenever the word processor is loaded. While the 128k version of my Quick Brown Box does hold a small version of TWS dictionary continuously in memory with the word processor, I still need to load the large dictionary to my REU for a more complete spell checking at a reasonable speed. TWS will save text files to the REU. Unfortunately, when the computer is turned off, these files are lost. While Printshop will not run from my REU, I have discovered that I can store a large number of Printshop image files in my REU for immediate access. The advantage is lost when my C-64 is turned off. GEOS is as slow as major league baseball unless it runs from a REU. A few minutes are required to load GEOS, switch disks, and then load the required files to the REU. Storm Microsystems has developed a software loader that resides in the QBB and significantly speeds the loading of GEOS to the REU. Unfortunately this low priced program conflicts with the version of TWS which resides in my Box. A GEOS reviewer mentioned in an article which explained GEOS' reboot feature that his computer stayed on continuously so that he never had to reload his REU. I knew a businessman who in order to access his TWS dictionary left his Commodore on from Monday to Friday. While he only had to load his dictionary once a week, I suspect he shortened his computer's life.

For as little as $150 the CMD RAMLink will maintain the REU power while the computer is turned off. Power comes from a separate AC wall socket. An additional $25 will provide a battery back up so that if there is a local blackout, REU power will be maintained. $175 in total plus shipping will guarantee that you do not have to continually reload your REU, or leave your computer on indefinitely. Of course most purchasers of RAMLink buy it with a RAMcard so that it has its own memory.

It is possible to maintain your REU memory both with wall current and battery back up for $59. Performance Peripherals has developed the BBU (Battery Back Up), device which allows me to use my 1571 REU as a long term storage device. Every couple of months my area of Nova Scotia has a power outtage. This has not affected my REU thanks to the battery (4 D cells) back up of the wall AC supply. An additional advantage of this system is that I do not need to use a heavy duty power source for my C-64, since a separate power source is supplied with my BBU. Any of the 17XX series of Commodore REUs is supported as well as GEORAM. If the REU is used for GEOS, the GEOS environment and all necessary applications and files are always available . Booting my REU and its contents from my Gateway disk takes less than ten seconds. GEOS uses virtual memory by loading what is required of a program in layers. In this way a program size can exceed the size of my C-64 memory. With my 512k REU, I have a virtual and instantly accessible memory of about 550k! There is no other computer platform that can load that much memory that quickly.

If the user will primarily work with GEOS, PPI has a more dedicated solution: BBG RAM. It is similar to the BBU except that a separate REU is not needed. PPI has developed a battery and AC supported non volatile RAM device which works exclusively with GEOS. It will not serve any other REU function. Its price depends on its size: 512k-$89, 1Meg-$119, 2Meg-$159. My 2Meg version is still only half full. As with the BBU, the boot disk loads GEOS and the REU contents in under 10 seconds. To intentionally repeat: No other platform can load 2 megabytes of memory that quickly. Now that the loading sequence and the time required is not a concern, I find that I am more likely to use my computer for a brief job, and to use GEOS rather than a smaller program to write a note or draw an image.

Many of my non-GEOS programs can also use an REU: the Jiffydos file copier, Ckit 64 Compressor Kit, Big Blue Reader, and The Write Stuff word processor. Speedscript and my Real Time Clock programs will run from my REU. I did not want to sacrifice these utilities but I still wanted instant access to GEOS. My solution was to obtain both BBGRAM and BBU. My idea was that I could use BBGRAM as a dedicated GEOSRAM drive and use the BBU for all other REU purposes.

First I wanted to check the compatibility on my Aprospand extender card of the two RAM drives. I was able to run GEOS separately from either cartridge while they coexisted on the Aprospand. I switched the slot of the cartridge that was not being used off while I used either cartridge. I was also able to use my 1750 REU for permanent TWS dictionary storage with the BBU while storing my GEOS environment in the BBGRAM. Unfortunately I also use two Quick Brown Boxes (total 128k), on my Aprospand. BBGRAM conflicts with QBB memory, even when the slot for the BBGRAM is turned off. The BBU supported REU works fine with my QBB cartridges on the same extender card. I can store TWS in the QBB, and its large dictionary in the BBU/REU and have instant access to both. I sent the BBG back and kept the BBU. Eventually I realized a solution. I have a Navaronne extender card that I had stopped using because it only allows one cartridge slot to be turned on at a time. I purchased an extender ribbon for my cartridge port. I bought the 2meg BBGRAM. The BBGRAM cartridge occupies my Navaronne extender card. The 2 QBB's and BBU/REU share the Aprospand. When I wish to switch environments, I disconnect/reconnect the cartridge end of my extender ribbon. There is no wear on either my cartridge port or cartridges.

My plans have not worked out as I intended. Although I would like to store a great deal of data permanently in my 1750/bbu combination, some of my most frequently used programs, BBR and CKit 94, use the REU as a copy buffer, which erases its previous contents. I do appreciate the speed of the buffer. Consequently I store frequently used programs like my Real Time Clock, in the REU until I use the buffer function. Melvin Montgomery a few years ago had a solution. His 2 meg expansions to REUs could include a

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manual switch which allowed up to four partitions of the REU memory. This might allow me to store data in some partitions while using others as buffers. I do have one remaining slot on my Aprospand. If I purchased another REU, one REU could be a volatile buffer. I think the volatile REU could co-exist with either the BBU or BBGRAM- on either extender board.

Gazette magazine discovered recently that over half of its readers used REUs. For the costs involved, it would seem that the BBU would be an automatic purchase for any of these REU owners. If a GEOSuser did not own a REU, BBGRAM would save th e often futile hunt for a REU, and allow access to a Macintosh like environment with faster than Macintosh speed. I am not sure why GEOScolumnists have not been praising the cost/efficiency ratio of these products.

CMD produces RAMLink which costs much more than either of these systems- and appropriately, has many more features. It has its own operating system, can emulate any Commodore drive through partitions, and has its own natural partition configuration which can be of any size. It also through a manual button, allows switching of drive numbers so that RAMLink can be directly addressed as the source drive by standard programs. To be fair, BBGRAM also provides for partitions in GEOS by allowing the creation of several virtual drives in the same cartridge. My GEOS Topdesk from Dweezil allows virtual drives to be created in any REU. While the user may wish for all the features of the CMD product, it would be wise to do that cost/benefit comparison.

The creator of BBG/BBU, Peter Fiset, also developed the portable RAMDrive which has many of RAMLink's features, is almost as expensive, can coexist on my Aprospand with my REU and competes in some ways with BBG/BBU. My understanding is that it is only available to those of us who live outside the United States.

I am attempting to live on a fairly tight budget. That is one of several reasons why I appreciate my Commodore. When I combine my QBB's, BBU/REU and BBGRAM, I have access to nearly 3meg of instantly accessible memory. My financial outlay has been relatively insignificant. To paraphrase a different platform, maybe BBU and BBGRAM is memory "for the rest of us".

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